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ABSTRACT

Every child deserves excellent reading teachers because teachers make a difference in children's reading achievement and motivation to read. This position statement provides a research-based description of the distinguishing qualities of excellent classroom reading teachers. Excellent reading teachers share several critical qualities of knowledge and practice; they: (1) understand reading and writing development; (2) continually assess children's individual progress and relate reading instruction to children's previous experiences; (3) know a variety of ways to teach reading; (4) offer a variety of materials and texts for children to read; (5) use flexible grouping strategies; and (6) are good reading "coaches." In addition, excellent reading teachers share many of the characteristics of good teachers in general. They have strong content and pedagogical knowledge, manage classrooms so that there is a high rate of engagement, use strong motivation strategies that encourage independent learning, have high expectations for children's achievement, and help children who are having difficulty. (Contains 27 references and 13 related resources available from the International Reading Association.) (RS)

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Excellent READING TEACHERS

A Position Statement of the International Reading Association

Every child deserves excellent reading teachers because teachers make a difference in children's reading achievement and motivation to read.

This position statement provides a research-based description of the distinguishing qualities of excellent classroom reading teachers. Excellent reading teachers share several critical qualities of knowledge and practice:

1. They understand reading and writing development, and believe all children can learn to read and write.
2. They continually assess children's individual progress and relate reading instruction to children's previous experiences.
3. They know a variety of ways to teach reading, when to use each method, and how to combine the methods into an effective instructional program.
4. They offer a variety of materials and texts for children to read.
5. They use flexible grouping strategies to tailor instruction to individual students.
6. They are good reading "coaches" (that is, they provide help strategically).

   (See the chart at the end of this piece for resources that address each of these characteristics.)

In addition, excellent reading teachers share many of the characteristics of good teachers in general. They have strong content and pedagogical knowledge, manage classrooms so that there is a high rate of engagement, use strong motivation strategies that encourage independent learning, have high expectations for children's achievement, and help children who are having difficulty.

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What evidence is there that good reading teachers have a positive effect on children's reading achievement and motivation to read?

Teachers make a difference. There is a growing body of evidence that documents teacher effects on children's reading achievement scores (Jordan, Mendro, Weerasinghe, & Dallas Public Schools, 1997; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Teacher effectiveness—which can be measured as scores on teacher proficiency tests (Ferguson, 1991), past records of students' improved scores, teachers' level of education, type of appointment (tenured, probationary, substitute), and years of experience (Armour, Clay, Bruno, & Allend, 1990)—is strongly correlated with children's reading achievement. Moreover, teachers have strong effects on children's motivation to read (Ruddell, 1995; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

What do excellent reading teachers know about reading development?

Excellent reading teachers know that reading development begins well before children enter school and continues throughout a child's school career. They understand the definition of reading as a complex system of deriving meaning from print that requires all of the following:

- the development and maintenance of a motivation to read
- the development of appropriate active strategies to construct meaning from print
- sufficient background information and vocabulary to foster reading comprehension
- the ability to read fluently
- the ability to decode unfamiliar words
- the skills and knowledge to understand how phonemes or speech sounds are connected to print

(International Reading Association, 1999; see also Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998)

Excellent teachers understand that all components of reading influence every stage of reading, but they also realize that the balance of instruction related to these components shifts across the developmental span and shifts for individual children. Excellent teachers understand how reading and writing development are related, and they effectively integrate instruction to take advantage of the child's development in both areas. They are familiar with the sequence of children's reading development. They believe that all children can learn to read and write.

How do excellent reading teachers assess student progress?

Excellent reading teachers are familiar with a wide range of assessment techniques, ranging from standardized group achievement tests to informal assessment techniques that they use daily in the classroom. They use the information from standardized group measures as one source of information about children's reading progress, recognizing that standardized group achievement tests can be valid and reliable indicators of group performance but can provide misleading information about individual performance. They are well aware that critical judgments about children's progress must draw from information from a variety of sources, and they do not make critical instructional decisions based on any single measure.

Excellent reading teachers are constantly observing children as they go about their daily work. They understand that involving children in self-evaluation has both cognitive and motivational benefits. In the classroom, these teachers use a wide variety of assessment tools, including conferences with students, analyses of samples of children's reading and writing, running records and informal reading inventories, anecdotal records of children's performance, observation checklists, and other similar tools. They are familiar with each child's instructional history and home literacy background. From their observations and the child's own self-evaluations, they draw knowledge of the child's reading development, and they can relate that development to relevant standards. They use this knowledge for planning instruction that is responsive to children's needs.

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What do excellent reading teachers know about instructional methods and how to combine them to meet the needs the children they teach?

Excellent reading teachers know a wide variety of instructional philosophies, methods, and strategies. They understand that excellent reading instruction addresses all the essential elements of reading. They are aware that instructional strategies vary along many dimensions, including the component of reading targeted by the instruction (for example, pronouncing words, understanding text, building motivation), the degree to which the instruction is teacher- or student-directed, and the degree to which the instruction is explicit or implicit. They understand that children vary in their responses to different types of instruction, and they select the most efficient combination of instructional strategies to serve the children in their classrooms. They know early intervention techniques and ensure that children get the help they need as soon as the need becomes apparent. For example, in a single middle grade classroom, teachers have children who still recognize very few words and struggle with decoding, children who are fluent and avid readers who can and do read everything they get their hands on, and children who are fluent decoders but struggle with comprehension and motivation. In the case of a struggling reader, excellent reading teachers know enough about the child and the child's instructional history to provide access to very easy books on topics studied by the class. The teacher can work with similar children in a small group to build sight vocabulary and decoding fluency, and the teacher can provide appropriate accommodations so that these children can benefit from comprehension instruction and continue to learn critical content despite their reading difficulties.

What kinds of texts and reading materials do excellent reading teachers use in their classrooms?

Excellent reading teachers include a variety of reading materials in their classrooms. Sometimes they rely on one or several reading series as the anchor of their reading program, but they also have supplemental materials and rich classroom libraries that contain at least seven books per child. They read to their students,

and they provide time in class for children to read independently. They are aware of the reading abilities and interests of the children, and they constantly provide a selection of books that will be both interesting to the children and within the children's reading capabilities. Excellent reading teachers are familiar with children's literature. They include a wide variety of fiction and nonfiction genres (such as storybooks, novels, biographies, magazines, and poetry). Excellent reading teachers also use school and public libraries to ensure children's access to appropriate books.

How do excellent reading teachers organize their classrooms for instruction?

Excellent reading teachers organize their classrooms so that schedules are predictable and children know what is expected of them in a variety of activities throughout the instructional day. They use flexible grouping strategies. When there is new and difficult information to convey that most of the class needs to learn, excellent reading teachers use large-group, direct, explicit instruction. They model the focal strategy or skill, demonstrate how and when to use it, and explain why it is important. They guide the children in their use of the skill or strategy, gradually diminishing support and assistance and requiring students to assume greater responsibility as the children become more skilled. They provide opportunities for individual practice and observe children in their use of the skill or strategy. During practice activities, they observe children closely, intervening when necessary with a question or comment that moves children forward. They also know which children will benefit from all elements of a direct instruction lesson in a particular skill or strategy and which children will need only a brief period of guided instruction or review followed by independent practice. They use efficient grouping practices to accommodate these differences.

Excellent reading teachers also understand that large-group, direct instruction is time-consuming and costly and that, often, many children in the class will not benefit from this instruction. They know when to organize children in large groups for direct, explicit instruction, when small-group or individual instruction is more appropriate, and when children will learn more efficiently on their own. They help children advance in reading by differentiating the type of instruction, the degree of support, and the amount of practice

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efficiently on their own. They help children advance in reading by differentiating the type of instruction, the degree of support, and the amount of practice children receive. They do not allow children to spend time learning what they already know and can do.

How do excellent reading teachers interact with children?

Excellent reading teachers interact with individual children frequently in the course of their daily teaching activities. As they help children solve problems or practice new skills and strategies, they "coach" or "scaffold" children by providing help at strategic moments. They are skilled at observing children's performance and using informal interactions to call children's attention to important aspects of what they are learning and doing. They

Characteristics of Excellent Reading Teachers: Research Support

Article	1	2	3	4	5	6
Anders, P.L., Hoffman, J.V., & Duffy, G.G. (2000)	p. 7 p. 16					p. 6
Briggs, K.L., & Thomas, K. (1997)		p. 27 p. 28 p. 33		p. 8 p. 9	p. 14	p. 527
Brophy, J. (1982)		p. 259	p. 527		p. 529	p. 527
Duffy, G.G., Roehler, L.R., & Mermann, B.A. (1988)	p. 762	p. 763	p. 766			p. 766
Haberman, M. (1995)		p. 19				p. 19 p. 20 p. 86
Hoffman, J., & Pearson, P.D. (1999)		p. 16	p. 17			
Knapp, M.S. (1995)	p. 127 p. 128	p. 126	p.127-8 p.130-3 p.136-7 p.142			
Ladson-Billings, G. (1994)	p. 123	p. 124				p. 124
Metsala, J.L. (1997)	p. 520	p. 519	p. 519 p. 520	p. 519	p. 519	p. 520
Moll, L. (1988)	p. 466 p. 468	p. 469		p. 468		p. 468
Pederson, E., Faucher, T.A., & Eaton, W.W. (1978)	p. 22					
Pressley, M., Rankin, J., & Yokoi, L. (1996)	p. 371 p. 375 p. 377				p. 373	
Ruddell, R.B. (1995)	p. 456	p. 455	p. 455 p. 456		p. 455	
Sweet, A.P., Guthrie, J.T., & Ng, M.M. (1998)	p. 217 p. 220	p. 218 p. 220	p. 215 p. 217 p. 220			
Taylor, B.M., Pearson, P.D., Clark, K.F. & Walpole, S. (1999)	p. 3	p. 45 p. 46	p. 3	p. 44-6	p. 11	
Teddlie, C., & Stringfield, S. (1993)	p. 192					
Tharp, R.G. (1997)		p. 6	p. 6			p. 5
Thomas, K.F. & Barksdale-Ladd, M.A. (1995)		p. 171 p. 172	p.171 p.172 p.176-7	p. 173		
Wharton-McDonald, R., Pressley, M., & Hampston, J.M. (1998)	p. 119		p. 111 p. 112	p. 112		p. 116

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often help children with a difficult part of the task so that the children can move forward to complete the task successfully. It is important to note that such teaching is neither incidental or unsystematic. Excellent reading teachers know where their children are in reading development and they know the likely next steps. They help children take these steps by providing just the right amount of help at just the right time.

Recommendations for Developing Excellence in Reading Instruction

- Teachers must view themselves as lifelong learners and continually strive to improve their practice.
- Administrators must be instructional leaders who support teachers' efforts to improve reading instruction.
- Teacher educators must provide both a solid knowledge base and extensive supervised practice to prepare excellent beginning reading teachers.
- Legislators and policy makers must understand the complex role of the teacher in providing reading instruction and ensure that teachers have the resources and support they need to teach reading. Legislators and policy makers should not impose one-size-fits-all mandates
- Parents, community members, and teachers must work in partnership to assure that children value reading and have many opportunities to read outside of school.

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Related Resources Available From the International Reading Association

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Building a Knowledge Base in Reading
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